

Erasmus exchange programme on cross- and multicultural education

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Abstract: Nowadays, we do not consider concepts from a single point of view but with an interdisciplinary approach. Researchers working in different domains treat concepts from multiple perspectives by cooperating in a scientific discipline. Educational sciences, like other areas of science, have adopted this interdisciplinary approach. Intercultural education and multicultural education is one of the best applications of the interdisciplinary approach in the domain of education. Erasmus exchange programme has particularly contributed to cross-cultural education. This study aims at analyzing studies that have investigated these contributions. We think that cross- and multicultural studies from different countries are important to have a clear and comprehensive vision. To this end, we reviewed studies in literature examining the effects of Erasmus exchange programme on cross-cultural education. We interpreted the results of these studies by qualitative research techniques and made suggestions for further studies. Consequently, it is a clear fact that exchange programmes are useful and students have a chance to communicate interculturally.

Key words: Erasmus, cross-cultural education, multicultural education

1. Introduction

One of the most important elements for a community during the phase of becoming an information society is technological advancement. Paralleling with technological development, globalization progress has accelerated and individuals' perspectives have changed (Kasapoğlu-Önder and Balci, 2010). During the process of becoming an information society, changes have occurred in the culture of society due to the technological developments.

Culture is an abstract term which explains people's life styles in a social group, social values, shortly—how they organize their lives (Eßer, 2006). Today cultures are born and grow up like a living being; they change and develop constantly. Together with this change, different ways have been needed to describe culture. One of these ways, which is mostly used, is multiculturalism. There are different descrip-

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tions of multiculturalism according to different points of view. Even though, there have been some attempts to explain multiculturalism with the factors such as race or ethnicity, in the research having been conducted in recent years it includes variables such as race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, religion and age (Başbay and Bektaş, 2009). Pedersen (1991) and Valentiin (2006) also emphasize that culture should be dealt with from a broad perspective. Pedersen (1991) describes culture in a way to cover formal and informal relationship, variables related to status such as social, education and economic, demographic variables like gender and accommodation, along with the ethnographic variables including race, nationality, ethnicity, language and religion.

With multiculturalism becoming such popular, it was inevitable that this notion came into prominence in education volume. Multicultural education is about the obstacles in front of the cultural equality in an education process (Rego and Nieto, 2000). The top problem in removing these obstacles is communication barriers, and cross-cultural education is about these barriers. Among the tools that both the multiculturalism and cross-cultural education can use the social media and student exchange programme are the primary. With exchange programme, the students are trained to get cross-cultural proficiency in possible situations when the students may come across with a new culture. This proficiency goes through developmental process which can be explained in six steps as follows: refusing the differences, defending self culture against the differences, putting forward the common cultural characteristics, accepting the differences, accepting to adapt to the different cultures and accepting to live with different cultures (Hammer et al., 2003).

Although there are many students exchange programmes and scholar opportunities aiming at multicultural and cross-cultural education (Erasmus, Comenius, Fulbright, Mevlana, etc.), the most universal ones are clearly Life Long Learning (LLP) programmes. Life Long Learning programmes, known as with the names of the philosophers like Erasmus, Comenius, and Socrates, gather the students and academicians from different cultures and stand by to bring about and develop respect, tolerance, understanding and peace.

Socrates programme was changed into Life Long Learning Programme (LLP) in 2007. And since 2007, Erasmus programme was structured as an under branch activity area of lifelong learning programme. Erasmus programme named European Community Action Schema for the Mobility of University Students, is a programme within the lifelong learning programme, oriented to the collaboration of higher education (European Commission, 2013). The programme started as piloting scheme in 1976 for the first time as a result of the activity programme prepared in educational area and has been conducted actively since 1987. Among the goals of the programme, there are important issues like: to enhance the quality of education in Europe; to develop common projects by ensuring that the higher education institutions of European union countries and candidate countries cooperate together; to exchange student, staff and instructor and to make the studies and the points done and gained abroad academically known after returning to one's own country.

Although Erasmus programme is one of the biggest exchange programmes in the world, it is believed that there is not many studies on it. In the literature, there are some studies about the problems faced during mobility, student views, and evaluations, but these seem to be very limited in number. That is why it is believed collecting the studies on the Erasmus pro-

gramme is useful. In this respect, this study aims to determine the contribution of Erasmus programme to multicultural and intercultural education and to offering suggestions to further studies by identifying the structure of the boundaries.

2. Method

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) emphasized in their study that there is a research technique consisting of content analysis, organizing and classifying texts, and drawing theoretical conclusions from texts. The resources used in the content analysis may be chosen by depending on rules or by incidentally finding answers to research questions; the important point here is to be parallel with the aims of the study.

For this aim, the literature was sought with these key words on 14 April, 2014: Erasmus Student Mobility, Erasmus Student Exchange Programme and Erasmus Culture. According to this search, the articles were chosen randomly with respect to being shown as reference in other studies, being recently published, and serving the purpose of the current study. In this study, it was decided that random content analysis method was chosen because this is not a meta-analysis or a general scanning study.

Consequently, related articles in SSCI (2014), Ebscohost (2014), and Google Scholar (2014) databases have been scanned in order to find answers to the research questions. Out of the 65, the more related articles that are contemporarily published have been chosen. According to the selection features, 56 articles have been included in this study.

3. Results

After content analysis, it was found that the studies related to Erasmus Student Mobility aimed to make general evaluations about the programme (Altbach and Teichler, 2001; Altınbaş, 2009; Corbett, 2003; Tauch, 2004), and moreover, these studies (mostly qualitative studies) were generally based on students' views (Bozkaya and Aydın, 2010; Ersoy and Günel, 2011; Figlewicz and Williams, 2005; Guo et al., 2009; Kasapoğlu-Önder and Balçı, 2010; Keogh and Roberts, 2009; Magos, 2007; Malewski and Phillion, 2009; Norberg, 2000; Şahin, 2008; Sancak, 2009; Sigalas, 2010; Teichler and Janson, 2007; Yuen, 2010).

Almost all of the studies have focused on the problems that students face, their satisfaction level and the benefits of the programme. The lack of orientation programmes, course equivalence value, communication and sheltering problems and insufficiency of grant amount are the topmost problems. Moreover, culture element has been emphasized as another important problem (Ersoy, 2013; Ersoy and Günel, 2011; Demir and Demir, 2009; Kasapoğlu-Önder and Balçı, 2010). It has also been emphasized that prejudice against the culture of the country they visit or against their own culture during their visit is the main source of this problem. However, it has been found out that this prejudice has disappeared after the exchange.

The positive progress in students' perceptions of their own and other cultures as a result of their intercultural experiences has been found as a significant evidence for the end of this prejudice. In addition, it has been found out that students' experiencing intercultural problems personally on language, culture and prejudice issues has helped remove this restriction.

The studies conducted by Ersoy (2013), Ersoy and Günel (2011), Guo, Arthur and Lund (2009), Magos (2007), Malewski and Phillion (2009), McKenzie and Purdy (2010) have found that thanks to students' intercultural experiences they realize the features of their own cultures better, they know their culture better, they compare their own culture with other cultures, and they criticize their own culture.

Figlewicz and Williams (2005) have stated the students' satisfaction levels as high in their study on students' satisfaction levels. The reason why these satisfaction levels are high has been associated with Erasmus students' being able to visit other European countries during recognizing cultures and mobility time.

Bracht et al. (2006), Gonzalez, Masanza and Mariel (2011) emphasized in their studies that people who have oversea experience and know other cultures thanks to these exchange programmes have become more successful in future due to the increase in their self-confidence and entrepreneurial abilities.

In addition to these studies, it has been found that the effect of intercultural education programmes on language has also been investigated (Sirok et al., 2007; Teichler and Janson, 2007). In all of these studies, it has been investigated that exchange programmes have a positive impact on students' foreign language improvement; especially English language is at the top of the list. However, it was found out that while students' speaking skills improved, some students' grammar accuracy deteriorated. It was interpreted that the deterioration resulted from the other students' language skills attending the exchange programme. It was concluded that, in terms of language skills which is one of the main components of multiculturalism, Erasmus programme is useful for students' language development.

Though it is stated that Erasmus programme has positive effects in general according to the research studies that were conducted, some studies reveal a number of limitations of the Erasmus programme. The most important limitations are the difficulty of matching the contents of the lessons and assessing students' academic success. Although the accordance of ETCS is asserted within the programme, there might be still some problems related to the content of the lessons. As a result of such problems, it is maintained that students sometimes cannot be competent adequately on the topics covered in the lessons. Moreover, it has been stated that students' evaluation of Erasmus programme wasn't carried out objectively and it resulted in mistakes in students' evaluations.

4. Conclusions

After the research studies, it has been concluded that Erasmus programme plays a significant role on multi- and cross-cultural education. The major reasons of this fact is that students experience new cultures like their own cultures and impose their own cultural values while experiencing other cultures. For that reason, necessary regulations should be carried out in order to aid students in benefiting from that kind of Exchange programmes. Especially it is considered that it will be useful to organize some activities after students return to their country to teach other students the culture they experienced and observed.

For the study, qualitative data collection method was used. However, it is clear that a general scale should be developed in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the exchange pro-

gramme with quantitative data analysis as well. For that reason, it is thought that it will be useful to develop an evaluation scale which will enable to evaluate students' satisfaction, a scale which will help to demonstrate how much students have benefited from the programme and a scale to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme.

It is considered that it will be useful to make university students responsible for taking some elective courses as a result of globalization and the prejudice problem which was revealed in the study. In that way, it is thought that students who can't have the opportunity of going to a foreign country thanks to Erasmus programme will have the chance of getting to know other cultures.

Consequently, it is a clear fact that exchange programmes are useful and students have chance to communicate interculturally. It should not be forgotten that this communication chance is not only international but also interzonal as culture may vary from city to city or region to region even in the same country. As a result, it is thought that student exchange programmes can be beneficial in interzonal settings. This will lead students to be able to compare different instructors and also to widen their horizons. The student exchange programme which is being conducted in Turkey and some other countries is recommended to European Union countries.

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Program wymiany Erasmus jako edukacyjna współpraca międzykulturowa

Abstrakt: We współczesnym podejściu do koncepcji edukacyjnych uwzględnia się różnorodne aspekty

interdyscyplinarne. Naukowcy działający w różnych dziedzinach rozważają koncepcje edukacyjne na wielu

płaszczyznach, współpracując w ramach swojej dziedziny nauki. Pedagogika, podobnie jak inne obszary nauki, również dostosowuje się do tych trendów. Edukacja międzykulturowa jest jednym z najlepszych rozwiązań w ramach interdyscyplinarnego podejścia do edukacji, a program wymiany studentów Erasmus szczególnie przyczynia się do jej rozwoju. W artykule zaprezentowano badania wpływu wymiany międzynarodowej w ramach programu Erasmus na edukację. Badania obejmowały różne kraje uczestniczące w pro-

gramie, co miało ukazać rzetelny obraz badanej dziedziny. W tym celu analizie poddano dostępną literaturę, stosując odpowiednie techniki badania jakości, zinterpretowano wyniki oraz sformułowano wnioski i sugestie odnośnie do dalszych badań. Rezultat końcowy potwierdził, że programy wymiany studentów mają ogromny wpływ na edukację międzykulturową oraz dają możliwość międzynarodowej komunikacji interkulturowej studentów z różnych krajów.

Słowa kluczowe: Erasmus, edukacja wielokulturowa, edukacja międzykulturowa
